



Air Tour Management Plans

Issue: The term Air Tour Management Plan (ATMP) has potentially immense implications for a national park, its resources, visitors, park operations, and neighbors. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and National Park Service (NPS) evaluate and determine under which conditions air tours may fly. The objective of an ATMP is to develop acceptable and effective measures to mitigate or prevent the significant adverse impacts, if any, of commercial air tour operations upon natural and cultural resources and visitor experiences.

The National Parks Air Tour Management Act of 2000 requires an ATMP for commercial air tours over any NPS park unit or abutting tribal lands and within ½ mile outside of park boundaries, excluding Alaska and the Grand Canyon.

Affected Resources & Communities:

Air tours have a visual impact, but their sound impact may be even greater and further reaching. The acoustic characteristics of aircraft (both helicopter and fixed wing) typically include sounds that resonate and are of frequencies that humans and wildlife can hear. One ATMP challenge is identifying the ecological relationship between soundscapes, wildlife, and humans. Any impacts that commercial air tours may have upon soundscapes and species must be identified, and mitigation measures might be needed to reduce the impact level.

A soundscape refers to the total acoustic environment of an area. Both natural and human sounds may be desirable and appropriate in a soundscape, depending on the purposes and values of the park. Soundscapes are valuable resources that can easily be degraded or destroyed by inappropriate sounds or sound levels. Soundscapes require careful management if they are to remain unimpaired for future generations.

Park visitors, nearby communi-

ties, native Hawaiian cultural practitioners, and others may also be affected by air tours. Ground-visitors to a national park may be seeking a different experience or have very different expectations than air tour visitors. Nearby communities are affected by the noise and visual impacts of routine and occasional flight traffic. In Hawaiian national parks, many Native Hawaiians, the Kalaupapa patient community, and others consider the land and airspace to be culturally significant.

Management Considerations: Each park's ATMP will be in the form of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. Each ATMP must address the affected environment, environmental impacts (including cumulative impacts and impairment), impact indicators or definitions, impact thresholds, mitigation, and provide for public and agency consultation.

ATMPs and Pacific Island Parks: Air Tour Management Plans are currently being developed for Haleakalā National Park and Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. These two parks are among the first to go through the ATMP process, along with three other national parks: Mount Rushmore, Badlands, and Lake Mead. Other national park units in Hawaii started the ATMP process: Kalaupapa National Historical Park, Pu'ukoholā Heiau, Kaloko-

Honokōhau, and Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau, but the process ended when the commercial air tour operators withdrew their requests to fly over or within ½ mile of these park units. Commercial air tours do not fly over or within ½ mile of the four other NPS Pacific Island Network park units so they do not need ATMPs. Hawaii parks are at the forefront of the ATMP process, and the results in Hawaii will be applied to other national parks throughout the U.S.

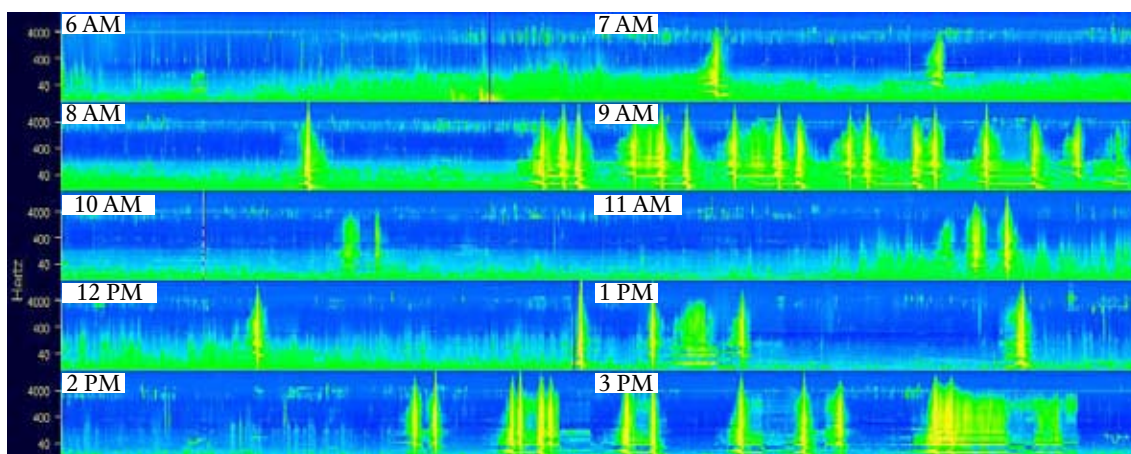
—Catherine Lentz

Further Information:

FAA & ATMP web page – www.atmp.faa.gov
NPS Natural Sounds Program web page – www.nature.nps.gov/naturalsounds
NPS Natural Sounds Program contact – Vicki McCusker, vicki_mccusker@nps.gov
Hawai'i Volcanoes ATMP contact – Catherine Lentz, catherine_lentz@nps.gov
Haleakalā ATMP contact – Liz Gordon, elizabeth_gordon@nps.gov

How you can be involved:

If you have information that might be useful for ATMPs please contact us at any time. The NPS maintains an ATMP mailing list and will send out notification of review and comment period for the draft ATMP. If you would like to be added to the mailing list for one or more of the three Hawaii parks please send us your name, address, and which park mailing list you would like to be on.



A picture of acoustic data collected southeast of Pu'u Huluhulu at Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park on January 25, 2003, from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. The scale on the left of each row is the frequency of the sound (40 to 4000 hertz). Sound magnitude along the frequency spectrum is represented by color, increasing from blue (quiet) to yellow (louder). The yellow spikes are probably helicopter overflights since this site is located near a known helicopter tour route. The first yellow spike occurs about 7:15 a.m., with many spikes between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. In contrast, the natural dawn bird chorus appears in the left-hand portion of the first row, starting before 7 a.m.

—Information adapted partially from the NPS Natural Sounds Program web pages.